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The Epic of *Farāmarz* in the Panjikent Paintings¹

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The wall-paintings uncovered in the Sogdian city of Panjikent, which for the most part date back to the first half of the eighth century, are the earliest certain illustrations of the Iranian epos. The most famous among these is undoubtedly the so-called "Rostam room," which was decorated with scenes from the exploits of the greatest Iranian hero—Rostam, celebrated in the *Shāh-nāma*.² However, the archaeologists from the Hermitage Museum who have excavated at Panjikent for more than sixty years have discovered several other paintings that have also been recognized as depicting scenes from heroic epic tales but whose exact subject and possible connections with the Iranian epos recorded in the classical Persian literature have remained unknown. In this article, I would like to suggest that one of these wall-paintings found in room 50/XXIII depicts scenes from the epic stories about Rostam's son, Farāmarz.

Room 50/XXIII, where the paintings were found during the 1978–1979 excavations, was part of a vast household that covered an area of 862.5 m² (fig. 1). Room 50 is of a rectangular shape (7.2 × 3.65 m). Together with other adjacent rooms, it originally belonged to an earlier house, which was rebuilt and incorporated into the new, large household, preserving some original walls.³ This reconstruction and the paintings date from around 740, when the city was recovering after it was sacked and burned by the Arabs in 722. At a later stage, two *sufas* (benches) were installed along the western and the eastern walls, covering the lower edge of the paintings. The large area covered by this household seems to indicate that it was probably owned by one of the leaders of the Panjikent urban community (*naf*).⁴ Due to its modest dimensions, room 50/XXIII was not a main reception hall but was used instead to host a limited circle of people

and was probably reserved for special occasions and/or for special purposes. It is interesting to note that the adjacent room 49/XXIII, which provided the only access to room 50/XXIII, was not painted. One can imagine that guests were first received in room 49/XXIII, where the main part of the reception and the banquet took place, before being led into room 50/XXIII. It is tempting to suggest that the latter was used as illustrations for reciting the epic depicted on its walls, as we think was the case with the epic paintings in Panjikent houses.⁵

The fragments of the paintings were preserved on all four walls. Most of them were taken down in 1979 and transported to the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, where they are currently kept. The paintings of the western wall are exhibited in the National Museum of Tajikistan in Dushanbe. Unfortunately, since then only some scenes have been completely restored; the others still await the clearing and restoration process, which will undoubtedly reveal more details. The following description is based on two excavation reports of 1978 and 1979,⁶ on two entries in the catalogue *Drevnosti Tadzhikistana*,⁷ on drawings and discussion by Boris Marshak in his 2002 volume,⁸ the color photos published in the vol. 15 of the Japanese *History of World Art*,⁹ and on my personal examination of the two restored fragments in the Hermitage Museum.¹⁰

The walls in the room were framed by a sculptured clay relief that displays floral motifs and figures standing under arches. The paintings covered the entire surface of the walls, bordered by these sculptured friezes. The background of the painting was blue, but on most fragments it has blackened. On the northern wall the artist depicted the image of the great Sogdian goddess Nana seated on a recumbent lion and the figures

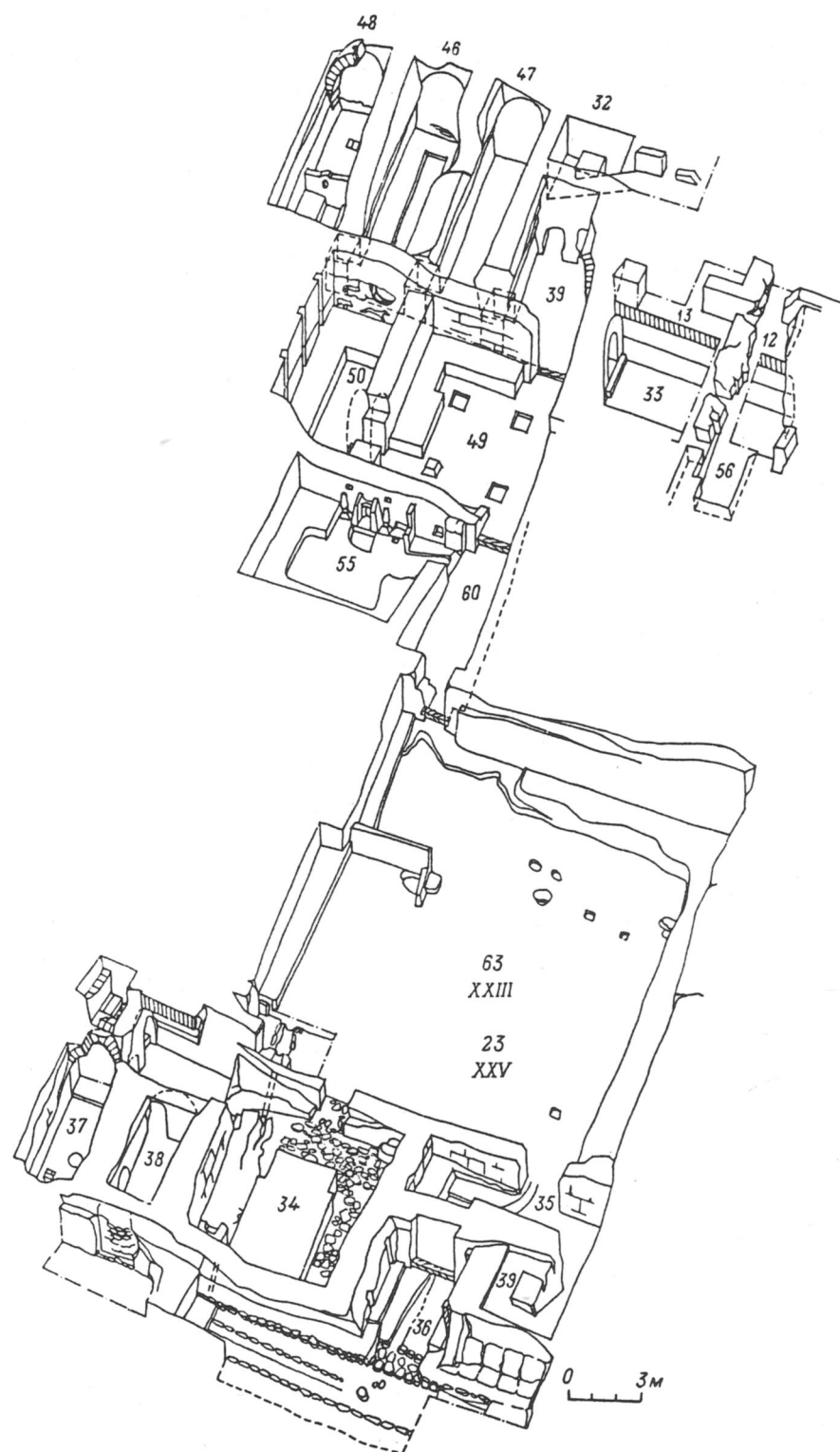


Fig. 1. Household XXIII-XXV in Panjikent. After Marshak 2002: fig. 8.

of donors of which only small fragments have survived. The paintings on the other walls were divided into two main registers. Unusually for the Panjikent paintings, they are not separated by a border. This fact seems to confirm that both registers depict the same narrative. In the upper register the events unfold from left to right and in the lower, from right to left. Therefore, the beginning of the narrative was probably painted in the upper register of the eastern wall, which unfortunately is completely lost.¹¹ The central place in the upper register on the western wall, where the preservation is the best, is occupied by a squadron of heavily armored horsemen engaged in battle with half-naked, ugly men riding wild animals (fig. 2 and color pl. 1; fig. 3). One of them is mounted on a lion and another on a bear. Under the hooves of the galloping horses one can see fallen warriors and their dying adversaries. The next episode shows mounted warriors chasing the defeated animal-riding "wild men." Only small fragments of the upper register on the eastern wall were preserved, but it seems that they depict the same cavalry battle(s) against similar half-naked people.

The story then passes to the lower register. In the first scene on the western wall one sees a rider on a red horse that stands peacefully. Next there is a figure of another warrior on a red horse pursuing a girl who rides a black horse. The girl wears a richly decorated dress; a nimbus surrounds her head. Her left hand holds a short staff that could be a scepter, a mace, or a shafted weapon—for example, an axe. Her horse has additional reins that are grasped by a three-headed and four-armed monster that rides a chariot drawn by two wild boars. The monster's body is white, the central head is topped with a helmet, and the two lesser heads have a particularly ferocious appearance with frightening grimaces and hair standing on end. All three heads are haloed. He wears a scale armor and holds a trident and a mace. A sword and a dagger attached to his belt add to his bellicose and imposing appearance.

Next comes the central scene of this register that shows a single combat between the hero on the red horse and the three-headed character (fig. 4). The hero grasps the helmet of the latter, bringing him down from the chariot, while the tricephalic monster desperately tries to stop the hero's hand and raises a mace. The artist placed this episode in the very center of the register. He

chose the most dramatic moment of the battle, when the hero captures the tricephalic monster with his hand and, showing his outstanding might, casts him down. Although the foe is not yet vanquished, it is obvious to the observer that his defeat is inevitable. The warrior on the red horse is represented in full profile, which is how heroes, demons, and other characters involved in combat are often represented in Panjikent art.¹² He wears chain mail and a helmet decorated with animal ears. Unfortunately only half of his body is preserved, but one might suggest that in the other hand he holds an axe, which is depicted in the next episode, where the opponents are shown wrestling (fig. 5). The axe depicted to the hero's left was probably used by him previously, before the combat reached its culmination in a wrestling match without weapons. It is also possible that the hero brandishes it for a decisive strike that will vanquish the three-headed monster. The dismounted girl watches the combat from a distance. The staff or the shafted weapon has disappeared from her left hand, in which she now holds the reins of her horse. It is possible that she holds it in the missing right hand or, assuming that it was an axe, she could have passed it to the hero to save him in the most dangerous moment, when the three-head foe has overcome him. From this scene on, she is depicted without a nimbus. The final episode on this wall shows the hero stabbing the kneeling three-headed, half-naked monster with a dagger in his belly, disemboweling him (fig. 6). He has been already stripped of his armor and weapons, which are placed in his former chariot, and has lost his nimbus.

The narrative then passes to the southern wall (fig. 7) and shows the hero kneeling before the partially preserved figure of a horseman (fig. 8). His right hand is raised in a gesture of respect or adoration. The rescued girl stands behind him. A very interesting and important detail is a small mountain that is depicted between the kneeling hero and the horseman. The latter is clad in clothing made of leopard skin and is mounted on a red horse with a white head and white stockings. He extends his hand towards the hero, but unfortunately his palm is missing and one cannot do better than to suggest that it was opened in a gesture of greeting and respect.

This scene is followed by a procession of foot soldiers carrying trophies, bows, and quivers. Next there is a lacuna followed by a group of five

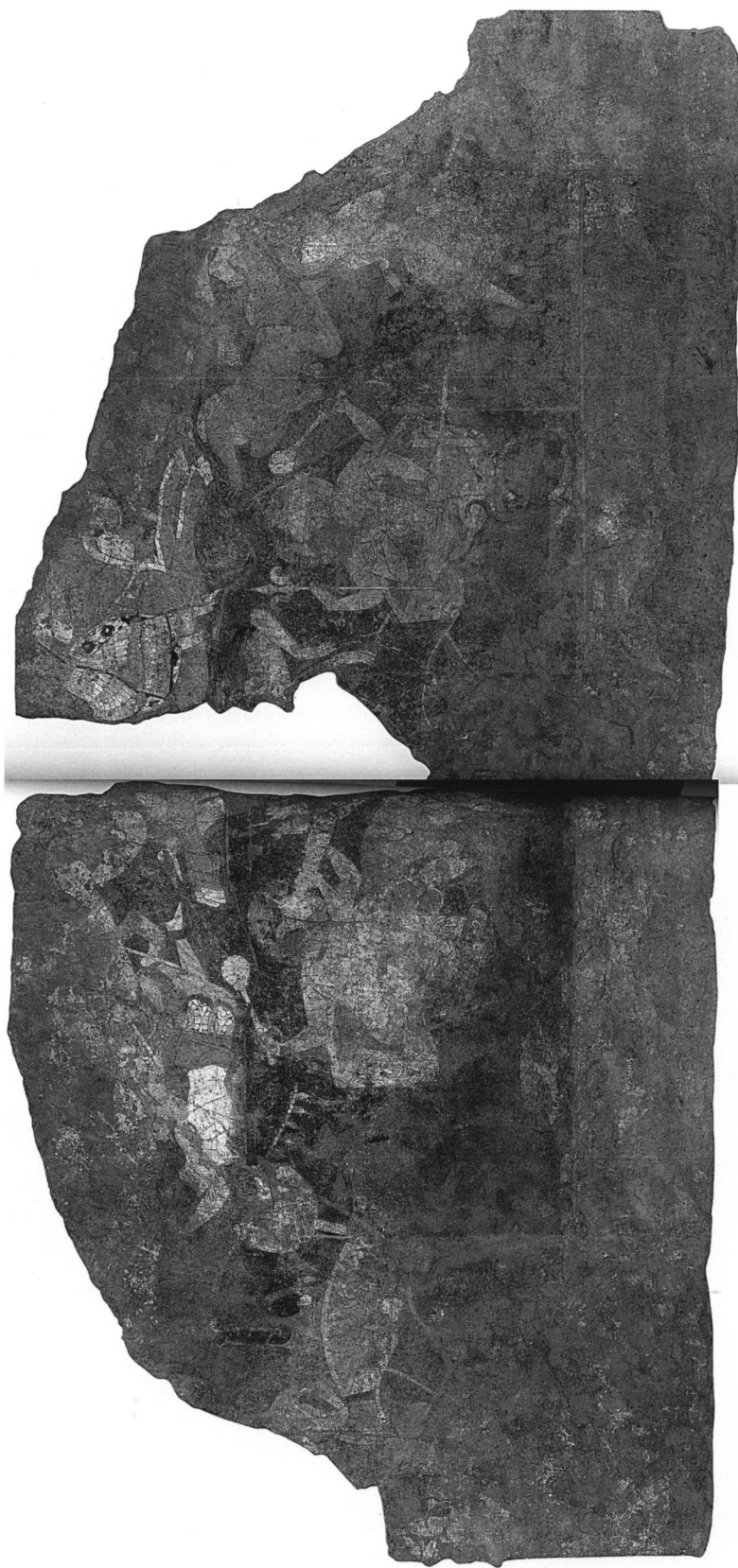


Fig. 2. The western wall, room 50/XXIII. After Tanabe and Maeda 1999: figs. 188–89.



Fig. 3. The western wall, room 50/XXIII (drawing). After Marshak 2002: fig. 56.

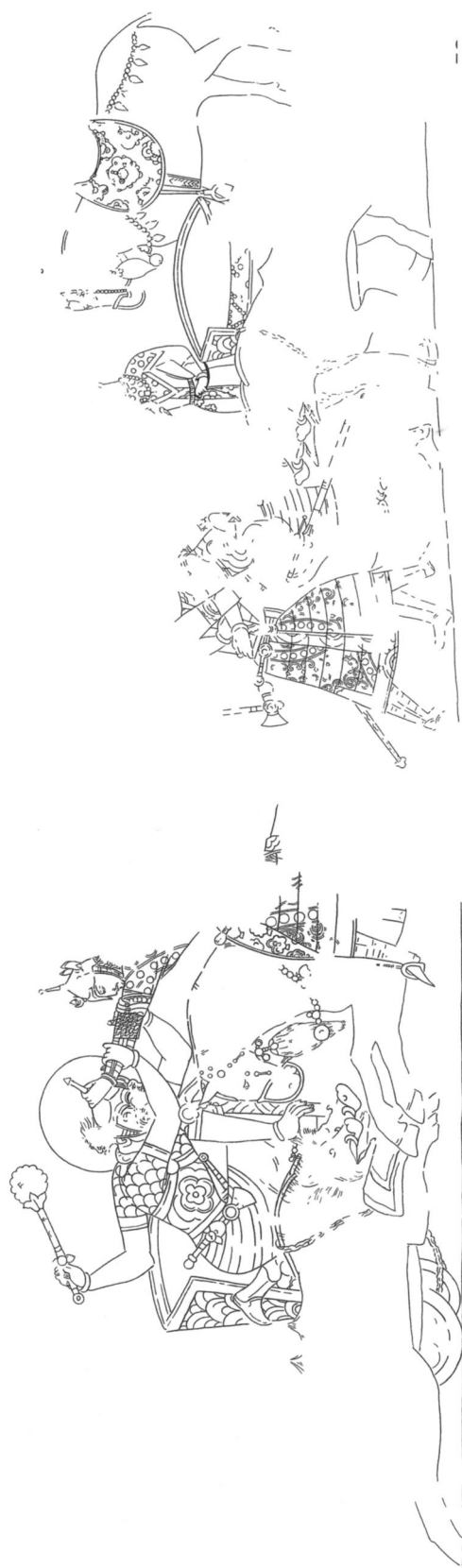


Fig. 4. Farāmarz fighting the demon (western wall, fragment). After Marshak 2002: fig. 57.

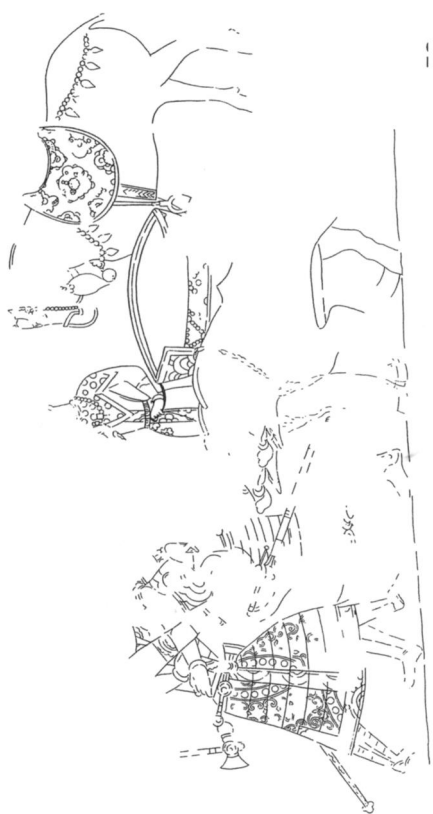


Fig. 5. Farāmarz wrestling with the demon (western wall, fragment). After Marshak 2002: fig. 58.

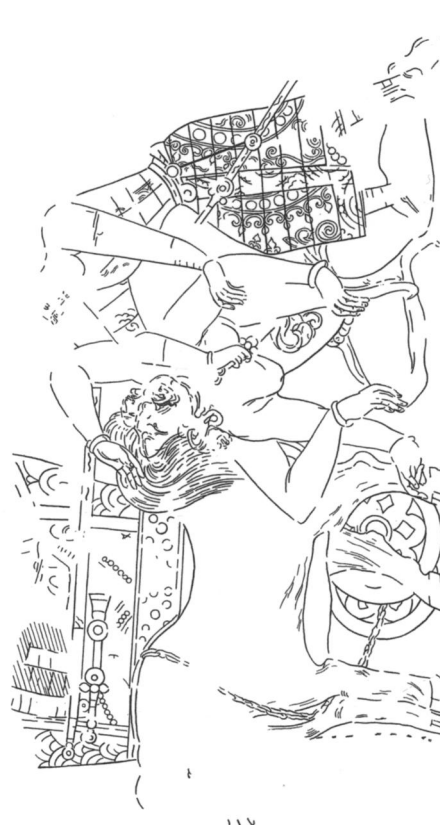


Fig. 6. Farāmarz killing the defeated demon (western wall, fragment). After Marshak 2002: fig. 61.



Fig. 7. The southern wall, room 50/XXIII. After Marshak 2002: fig. 63.



Fig. 8. Farāmarz and the daughter of the king of Kahilā before Rostam (southern wall, fragment). After Marshak 2002: fig. 62.

heavily armored horsemen (fig. 9). The hero is depicted in the foreground and is easily recognizable by his distinctive helmet decorated with animal ears. He holds a lance, and his horse is covered with an unusual, richly decorated horse cloth.

From the fill near this wall, additional smaller fragments of the paintings were recovered, showing a female face, the head of a dragon, and a fragment of a garment decorated with medallions containing the heads of boars. It is probable that



Fig. 9. The Sistānian army with trophies (southern wall, fragment). After Marshak 2002: fig. 64.



Fig. 10. The eastern wall, room 50/XXIII. After Marshak 2002: fig. 65.

the female is the same girl who was originally depicted in the lacuna behind the hero since she accompanies him in all other scenes.

On the eastern wall one sees the final episodes of the story (fig. 10). Two horsemen mounted on red horses approach, the first one being larger. Although only the horses are partially preserved, these are undoubtedly the main hero and his companion who previously appeared in the first scene in the lower register on the western wall. Next we see a group of standing men and women led by a taller figure wearing a leopard garment. His left hand rests on the hilt of a sword, while he raises his right hand in a gesture of respect or adoration towards a tent painted in the center of the register. Inside one sees the figure of a king seated

cross-legged among pillows on a *takht* supported by figures of elephants (fig. 11 and color pl. 2; fig. 12). He is nimbate, tongues of flames rise from his shoulders, and a flying ribbon of a royal diadem is depicted above it. In his right hand the king holds an axe, and by the gesture of his left hand the artist expressed the idea that the king is speaking to a youth and a girl kneeling before him. Although the youth wears rich garments instead of armor and helmet, there can be little doubt that he is the main hero depicted on the two other walls, since the girl behind him has exactly the same dress as the girl on the western and southern walls. In front of the hero, a helmet and scale-armor are placed so that they cover the right lower part of the throne. They might have belonged to the



Fig. 11. *Farāmarz* and the daughter of the king of Kahilā before Key Khosrow (eastern wall, fragment). Photo: Yuri Karev.

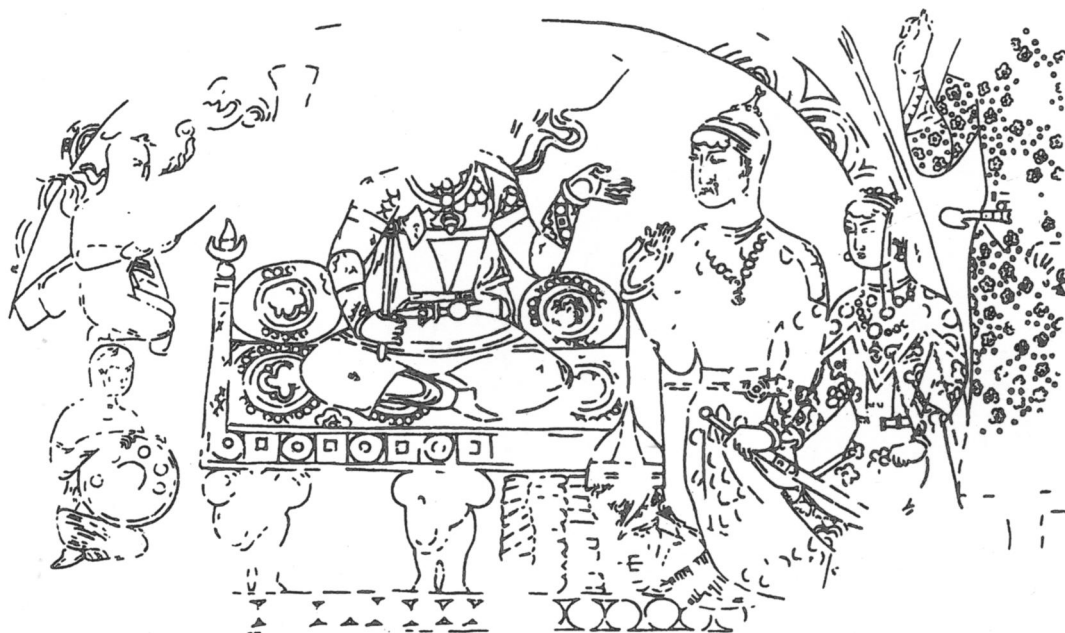


Fig. 12. *Farāmarz* and the daughter of the king of Kahilā before Key Khosrow (drawing). After Belenitskiy, Marshak, and Raspopova 1984: fig. 6.



Plate 1 (Shenkar, fig. 2). The western wall, room 50/XXIII. After Tanabe and Maeda 1999: figs. 188-89.



Plate 2 (Shenkar, fig. 11). Farāmarz and the daughter of the king of Kahilā before Key Khosrow (eastern wall, fragment). Photo: Yuri Karev.

defeated tricephalic monster who also wore scale-armor. An interesting detail is that the youth's hand placed on his sword also covers the girl's hand. On the hero's cheek there is a short Sogdian inscription, which is hardly visible and cannot be read. However, in any case, in Panjikent the majority of such inscriptions are secondary and not related to the subject of the paintings—for the most part, they are writing exercises.¹³ Behind the king there are two smaller figures of kneeling weapon-bearers, one with a shield and the second one holding a bow and a bow-case. A group of additional standing characters to the left of the royal tent and facing it concludes the painting in this register.

Below the main composition there is a narrow register depicting running animals painted on a red background: a dog, lion, wild goat, deer, elephant, boar, hare, tiger, gazelle, gryphon, bear, and zebu. The excavators assume that a similar narrow register with running animals on a red background also framed the main panel from above.¹⁴ On the part of the western wall, where the absence of a sufa created additional space, the artist depicted a hunting scene in which a horseman strikes a wild boar with a spear and his pedestrian companion raises his sword in order to strike the beast.

* * *

The preservation of the wall paintings in room 50/XXIII is one of the most exceptional in Panjikent and allows the reconstruction of virtually the entire narrative. While the upper register on all three walls probably represented episodes from the same battle, the lower registers depicted separate compositions. Both were, however, part of the same epic story. The main theme and the sequence of events seem clear. The hero, first accompanied by his companion, pursues a girl who has been kidnapped by a three-headed demon. The latter's iconography is remarkably close to that of the Sogdian god *Wēšparkar*, for whom he was at first mistaken.¹⁵ However, several differences between the tricephalic character and *Wēšparkar*, who has only one, ugly, head and who never rides a chariot, have led Belenitskiy and Marshak to correctly identify him as a demon.¹⁶ His likeness to *Wēšparkar* is due to the fact that the visual representation of both characters incorporates elements from Indian iconography: multiple heads

and hands and a trident, which is an attribute of *Śiva*. The boars harnessed to his chariot are reminiscent of *Varāha*, the boar avatar of the god *Viṣṇu*.

In the two following scenes the hero overcomes the demon in a dramatic single combat. The horseman on a red horse in the next episode, placed on the other side of a mountain, is undoubtedly *Rostam*, identified by his "leopard skin garment" (NP. *zīn-e palang*, Sg. *pwrδnk' cīm nγwδnn*) and by his red horse, *Raxš*. Next, one sees the march of the victorious army loaded with trophies and led by our hero (not identified by Marshak, probably because the animal ears on the helmet only became clearly visible after the fragment was cleaned). They arrive at the king's court, and, in the third scene, the hero and the girl have an audience with a king surrounded by his courtiers among whom *Rostam* stands out.

Despite the presence of *Rostam* and the obvious epic nature of the story, it was immediately recognized that the paintings of Room 50/XXIII do not correspond to any episode involving the great Iranian hero known from the *Shāh-nāma*. In the excavation report of 1979, Alexander Belenitskiy had cautiously suggested that the most fitting story seems to be that of *Bizhan* and *Manizhe*.¹⁷ However, in the following season when all the paintings were cleared, it became apparent that it does not illustrate any story from *Firdowsi*. This led Belenitskiy to assume that the paintings could depict a story from an unknown Sogdian epic.¹⁸ Marshak interpreted the 50/XXIII paintings as a story of *Rostam's* daughter, saved by an unknown hero to whom she is given in marriage by her father. Since no corresponding episode is known from the stories about the more famous daughter of *Rostam*, *Bānu Goshasp*, Marshak suggested that these paintings could rather be connected to *Rostam's* second daughter, *Zarbānu*, of whom very little is known.¹⁹

I would like to suggest that the paintings that decorated the walls of Room 50/XXIII are taken from the epic stories about *Rostam's* son, *Farāmarz*. More specifically, they illustrate his campaigns on the Indian islands, battle(s) against demons or strange inhabitants of these islands, and the story about his rescue of the daughter of the king of *Kahilā*, who was abducted by a demon, and his marriage to her, and also his return home with her to Iran, where he is greeted by his father *Rostam* and by his sovereign, *Key Khosrow*, who grants *Farāmarz* the Indian kingship.

Farāmarz appears in the *Shāh-nāma* as a secondary character who takes part in his father's campaigns and assumes the command of the Sistānian army after Rostam's death. It is only in the so-called "Persian epic circle" or the "later epics" and more specifically in the two *Farāmarznāmes* dedicated to his exploits that Farāmarz seems to step out of the shadow of his father and emerges as a great hero in his own right, acquiring popularity comparable to that of Rostam himself. The "later epics" are a number of poems composed by anonymous authors between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries in New Persian in emulation of the *Shāh-nāma*, whose internal rhyme and metre they follow. Their plots are an offshoot of Ferdowsi's chef-d'oeuvre, which they seek to supplement. Being considered late, secondary imitations, the "later epics" have long suffered from neglect from the scholars of Classical Persian and even more so from the students of pre-Islamic Iranian history and literature who have concentrated on the *Shāh-nāma*'s contents for reconstructions of ancient Iranian myths, legends, and history. As a result of this neglect most of the poems have not been critically edited and translated into Western languages.

Fortunately, Marjolijn van Zutphen has recently produced a masterly, in-depth study of the figure of Farāmarz in her doctoral dissertation currently being prepared for publication, which greatly facilitates any enquiry into the *Farāmarznāmes*.²⁰ Farāmarz was not included in the *Khwadāy-nāmag*, a late Sasanian compendium of mythical and historical traditions, but he was incorporated in the epos of the Islamic period from the Sistānian epic circle.²¹ He is explicitly mentioned for the first time by al-Ṭabarī in the tenth century C.E., but stories about him most likely circulated already in the pre-Islamic period as part of the epic circle about the Sistānian heroes, and the name Farāmarz (Bramarz, *βραμαρζο*) appears to be attested in two Bactrian documents dated between 659 and 662 C.E.²²

In the *Shāh-nāma*, Key Khosrow dispatches Farāmarz to conquer India. His adventures and exploits on the Indian subcontinent are the subject of the two poems, which differ both in size and in content, that are called the shorter and the longer *Farāmarznāme*. In these poems Farāmarz, at the head of a small army of Sistānian warriors that travels to India; sails around the Indian islands; battles against enemy armies of humans

and demons; defeats kings, heroes, *dīvs* and many fabulous creatures; converses with Brahmins; recovers treasures deposited for him by the great Iranian kings of the past; rescues and marries a princess; and is invested with the Indian kingship by Key Khosrow. The short *Farāmarznāme* was probably composed between the mid-eleventh and early twelfth centuries,²³ perhaps more precisely around 1100.²⁴ The longer poem appears to be earlier and was probably written towards the end of the eleventh century.²⁵

The Indian campaign of Farāmarz is a central motive of the both *Farāmarznāmes*, and therefore it apparently occupied an important place in the original Sistānian epic. Both the character of Farāmarz and the stories about his exploits and deeds in India in all likelihood go back to the pre-Islamic period.²⁶ Van Zutphen tentatively suggests that the figure of Farāmarz was possibly modeled on the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares (first half of the first century C.E), who allegedly came from the Parthian clan of Suren, the hereditary rulers of Sistān. The Indian campaign of Farāmarz then reflects the epic redaction of the legendary stories about the exploits and the conquests of the Sistānians south of the Hindu-Kush.²⁷ However, the particular popularity of stories about Farāmarz and his campaigns in India could owe much to the celebrated Indian conquests of the Ghaznavids.²⁸

All the scenes on the wall-paintings in room 50/XXIII can be interpreted based on the narrative of the longer *Farāmarznāme*. The large upper register depicted battles against half-naked, demon-like wild men riding wild animals. In both poems, Farāmarz comes against numerous demonic and human opponents. Although the savages in the upper register have repulsive, ugly facial features, they do not possess any of the usual attributes of demons in the Panjikent paintings such as animal heads, horns, wings, and hooves. However, in the fragment of a Sogdian text describing Rostam's fight against demons, the latter are described as riding wild animals: "many archers, many charioteers, many riding elephants, many riding *monsters, many riding pigs, many riding foxes, many riding dogs, many riding on snakes (and) on lizards, many on foot, many who went flying like vultures and [. . .], many upside-down, the head downwards and the feet upwards."²⁹ In the longer *Farāmarznāme* the Sistānian army also confronts inhabitants of several islands who

have bizarre physical features: black bodies, elephantine ears, or soft legs. They are savages who fight with bones and stones instead of weapons.³⁰ This description does not seem to correspond exactly to what we see on the paintings, but once again, specific details were necessarily different and we cannot exclude that the enemies of the Sistānians in the upper register are not demons, but the bizarre, demon-like inhabitants of the Indian islands as imagined by a Sogdian painter.

The first episodes on the western wall depict the events that take place on the second island called Kahilā that the Sistānians visit after sailing from mainland India. In the longer *Farāmarznāme* they are greeted and received by the local king and his courtiers, but an unexpected disaster darkens their stay at the court of the local king—his daughter is kidnapped by a hideous demon while sleeping in the countryside. The *dīv* is described as “large, black and ugly with bloodshot eyes, a big mouth with huge teeth and wolf-like claws.”³¹ Farāmarz volunteers to rescue the girl and confronts the demon in single combat. After firing arrows and fighting with spear and sword, Farāmarz uses his mace to break the demon’s back. The king’s daughter, who observes the battle, falls in love with the Sistānian hero, who later marries her. This romance of Farāmarz with the daughter of the king of Kahilā is inspired by the story of Rostam and Tahmine. His wife accompanies Farāmarz on his travels and is mentioned with him when a storm separates the Iranian hero from his army. We may safely assume that she also joined him during his journey home and his visit to Key Khosrow’s court. After their return to India she gave birth to a son, called Borzin-Ādar.³²

It is interesting that the shorter *Farāmarznāme* also contains a story of Farāmarz killing *Kannās Diw*, who had abducted three daughters of the Indian king Nowshād.³³ This motive was probably closely associated with him and thus very popular. It is not surprising, therefore, to find it also in a Sogdian version of this tale. Furthermore, the Sogdian artist chose this episode as a central one in the whole Indian campaign of Farāmarz. There are, of course, differences in details between the wall-paintings in the room 50/XXIII and the longer *Farāmarznāme*. Most significantly, the three-headed demon does not at all resemble the *dīv* described in the Persian poem. This should not surprise us, since both the Sogdian artist and the Persian poet obviously imagined the demon

differently. They contributed their own elements to the same core narrative and embellished it with different details. It is also worth noting that the paintings of the “Rostam room” show considerable differences from the *Shāh-nāma*. Just as in the scene with a witch who transforms herself into a dragon that attempts to devour Rostam with his horse, the Sogdian artist showed more “more imagination in the mutability of the bodily shape,”³⁴ and the same also applies to the depiction of the demon in the Farāmarz epic.

Nevertheless, in both the Sogdian painting and in the Persian poem, the daughter of the king of Kahilā observes the single combat between Farāmarz and the demon. Curiously, she seems to play a much more important role in the Sogdian epic than in both versions of the *Farāmarznāme*. She is shown together with Farāmarz in five out of six episodes of the paintings, being absent only in the fifth scene when the Sistānian hero leads his glorious army, loaded with trophies. It is also possible that she was originally depicted on a fragment that was not preserved.

The iconography of the three-headed demon includes numerous Indian elements, which is not exceptional in Sogdian art. The visual representation of the Sogdian gods, created starting from the fifth-sixth centuries C.E, incorporated numerous elements that seem to be directly borrowed from the contemporary art of northwestern India.³⁵ Panjikent demons, however, are usually not multi-headed and do not carry tridents as weapons. The iconography of the demon from 50/XXIII clearly shows much more prominent Indian influence. I believe that this is not due to the borrowing from iconography of Wēšparkar, but might rather reflect a well thought-out intention of the Sogdian artist to paint a specifically Indian demon that Farāmarz defeats on the Indian island.

The next scene after Farāmarz saves the daughter of the king of Kahilā shows the Sistānian hero and his wife returning to Sistān and being greeted by Rostam, to whom Farāmarz pays homage. The small mountain that separates them most probably does not represent the border of the “demons country” as Marshak suggested,³⁶ but the Hindu-Kush Mountains that separate Sogdiana from India. From the point of view of geographical reality, the shortest way from India to Sistān is through the Bolan pass in the Toba Kakar Mountains, but the main route from Sogdiana to India

was through the passes of the upper Indus, and therefore for the Sogdians India was located to the east, beyond the Hindu-Kush Mountains.³⁷

The longer *Farāmarznāme* places the episode of Farāmarz's triumphant return to Iran close to the end of the poem, after the Sistānian hero marries the daughter of Farṭurtush, the king of the fairies (*shāh-i pariyān*). Farāmarz arrives first at Zābolestān, where he is greeted by his grandfather Zāl. The Sogdian version again differs in details, since in the Panjikent painting, it is Rostam who meets Farāmarz at the border and only after that the Sistānian army proceeds to Iran. Rostam probably accompanies them, since he is shown again standing behind the king's tent in the next episode. In the longer *Farāmarznāme* Rostam waits for his son at Key Khosrow's court.³⁸

In the final scene preserved on the southern wall Farāmarz is shown riding alongside his knights. It is interesting that unlike the representation of Rostam leading his companions in the "Rostam room," the artist of the paintings in room 50/XXIII, chose a different way to indicate Farāmarz by placing him at the foreground but, at the same time, among his companions, emphasizing that although he is the main hero, his warriors also have an important role in the exploits. It is noteworthy that in the *Shāh-nāma* and in the Sogdian texts, Rostam fights the demons alone, while in the *Farāmarznāmes* we find both individual combats and mass battles between Farāmarz and his warriors and the demons.

Farāmarz's facial features are deprived of any individuality. This conforms to other depictions of heroic characters in Panjikent epic paintings, which show an idealized archetype. The only exception to this rule is Rostam, whose appearance was probably inspired by Hephtalite royal portraits.³⁹ However, Farāmarz has two distinctive attributes: his red horse and the animal ears on his helmet. The red horse seems to associate him with the house of Rostam and the famous red horse of his father, Raxš. Therefore, the second horseman on the red horse who accompanies Farāmarz on the first scenes on the western and the eastern wall should also belong to the Sistānian clan. Indeed, in the *Farāmarznāme*, Bizhan, who is Rostam's grandson and Farāmarz's nephew, accompanies him on his Indian campaigns and often takes part in battles against demons and enemy heroes. It is plausible, therefore, that the smaller rider on the red horse can be identified with Bizhan.

Similar animal ears to those on Farāmarz's helmet decorate the helmet of a four-handed male deity depicted together with Nana on an ossuary from Khirmantepa, in the Kashkadarya region of Uzbekistan.⁴⁰ It is possible that in Sogdian art this was one of the artistic expressions of supernatural power. However, in Panjikent animal traits are found exclusively associated with demons. Could this characteristically demonic trait be an allusion to the descent of Farāmarz from the demon-king Zahhāk through his paternal grandmother Rudabā? There is another interesting connection. In the *Farāmarznāme*, not only Rostam but also Farāmarz wear a tiger garment, *babr-e bayān*, on several occasions. In medieval Persian miniature paintings Rostam is often depicted wearing a tiger headgear with prominent animal ears. This is apparently not the case with the Sogdian images of Rostam, who is bareheaded. Also the ears that decorate Farāmarz's helmet most resemble horse ears and not feline ones.

A fragment showing a head of a dragon, which was found in the fill near the southern wall, perhaps belonged to the scene of the slaying a dragon. Killing a dragon is among the most popular exploits of a hero in the Persian epics. Also, Farāmarz fights dragons in both the shorter and the longer *Farāmarznāme*. It is interesting to note that in the shorter poem, Farāmarz is assisted by Bizhan. It is possible, therefore, that the fragment with the head of a dragon originally belonged to a scene depicting one of these episodes. However, in the lower register on the southern wall, there is not enough space for such a scene, which naturally must have preceded the return of Farāmarz from India, and it can be suggested that the head of a dragon was one of the trophies carried by Farāmarz's men.

The second particularly Indian element in the paintings is the throne of the king on the eastern wall, which is supported by the elephant figures. The king is Key Khosrow, who bestows Indian kingship upon the victorious Farāmarz. Although the image of an elephant is found in Sogdian art in the context of the representation of the royal power in the paintings in the "Red Hall" of Varakhsha and on the "Ambassadors paintings" from Samarkand,⁴¹ the throne supported by elephants is known only from a series of terracottas depicting an enthroned beardless male deity holding a cithara.⁴² The throne of Key Khosrow in room 50/XXIII is unique in that it has three

animal figures in front instead of the usual two. Although only two elephant figures are visible in the painting, one of them is in the middle of the throne, which means that there must also be the third support, hidden by the trophies (a square *takht*, of course, must have either six or four supports in order to be stable). In the longer *Farāmarznāme*, Farāmarz makes a throne from the bones of a giant bird killed by him. He decorates the throne with images of animals, birds, and planets and sends it to Key Khosrow. Apparently, the Iranian king likes it so much that he turns it into his favorite throne.⁴³ It is likely that this motive was also known to the Sogdians, and in Panjikent the Sogdian artist attempted to represent this exotic Indian throne. The elephants symbolize Key Khosrow's sovereignty over India achieved through the victorious campaigns of his champion Farāmarz, while the non-typical number of supports might be taken as an allusion to its extraordinary appearance and decorations.

This particular royal enthronement scene is unparalleled in Sogdian art and is more reminiscent of the Sasanian prototypes by which it was probably inspired.⁴⁴ Other Sogdian royal images (although we have exceedingly few examples) are markedly different and show rulers in a much more modest entourage.⁴⁵ The frontal pose, animal supports, flying ribbons, pillows, and the arrangement of the enthroned king in the center of the composition surrounded by his court circle are typical of the Sasanian royal representations, but in Panjikent, the static Sasanian posture of the king resting his hands or hands on a sword hilt was replaced with a free gesticulation characteristic of Sogdian art. Also, the cross-legged pose is typically Central Asian, and the axe that Key Khosrow holds in his right hand is never shown associated with Sasanian kings.

This weapon was connected with the royal symbolism in Sogdiana and Eastern Iran, perhaps being an influence of the Iranian nomads.⁴⁶ An image of a king seated on a stool and holding an axe was found in Panjikent 1/VI (fig. 13),⁴⁷ and three kings depicted in different scenes of royal receptions in room 28/XXV hold an axe.⁴⁸ One of them, on the painting in the southern part of the eastern wall, even holds an axe in exactly the same position as Key Khosrow (fig. 14). The axe is also a principal attribute of a bearded male personage wearing a winged crown depicted on one of the Sogdian ossuaries from Biyanajman (fig. 15).⁴⁹

An image close to that of Key Khosrow from the Farāmarz painting is also found on the Klimova plate held by the Hermitage Museum, which is usually dated to the seventh century C.E. It was produced in Eastern Iran and shows extensive Sasanian influence (fig. 16).⁵⁰ The plate depicts the moon god Māh as a cosmic ruler in his chariot drawn by a pair of bulls. The god is seated cross-legged on a *takht* on which cushions and a long-shafted axe are placed. A bust of a king holding an axe is also depicted on the coin of an unknown Turk-Shahi ruler minted in Kabulistan or Zabulistan in the first half of the eighth century C.E., which is contemporary with the Panjikent paintings (fig. 17).

* * *

There is a particular element in these wall-paintings that merits special attention—a nimbus possessed by three characters: the daughter of the king of Kahilā, the three-headed demon, and Key Khosrow. Beginning with the coins of the Kushan king Huvishka the nimbus becomes one of the most popular elements in the divine and royal iconography of the ancient Iranians. A thorough analysis of the development, significance, and meaning of the nimbus in the iconography of the pre-Islamic Iranian world that has so far defied satisfactory explanation is beyond the scope of this article, but the paintings in room 50/XXIII might make a significant contribution to such a discussion for the following reason. Narrative scenes are extremely rare in ancient Iranian art; usually there is only a static image of a nimbate king or a deity. The "Farāmarz painting" provides a unique opportunity to examine the changes that affect the characters in a possession of a nimbus as the story unfolds. One can see that the possession of a nimbus is not absolute and unconditional. Both the three-headed demon and the daughter of the king of Kahilā lose it after the second and the first scenes respectively. It seems clear that the demon loses the nimbus when he is defeated, but it is more difficult to understand why the girl is nimbate only in the first scene when she is being led captive by the demon. Marshak explained it as an emanation of the "demon's magic power which has cast spell on the girl."⁵¹ It is also possible that since in all subsequent scenes she is shown together with Farāmarz who does not have a nimbus, the artist felt it would be inappropriate to show her adorned

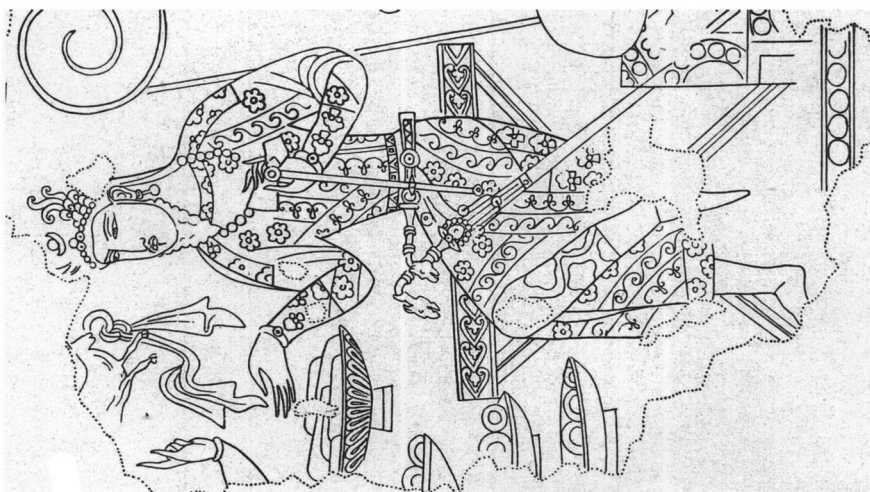


Fig. 13. An image of the king on paintings in room 1/VI, Panjikent. After D'yakonov 1954: pl. XXXVI.



Fig. 14. A scene of royal reception from Panjikent 28/XXV, southern part of the eastern wall. After Marshak and Raspopova 1990: fig. 29.



Fig. 15. A character holding an axe on a Biyanajman ossuary. After Grenet 1986: fig. 44.



Fig. 16. The "Klimova Plate." After Trever and Lukonin 1987: fig. 29.



Fig. 17. A coin of unknown Turk-Shahi king (first half of eighth century C.E.). Bernisches Historisches Museum. *The Countenance of the Other: The Coins of the Huns and Western Turks in Central Asia and India*. Digital Exhibition Catalogue (<http://pro.geo.univie.ac.at/projects/khm/>).

with a halo. All that can be said with some confidence about the nimbus in the paintings of room 50/XXIII is that one can definitely lose it, but it remains unclear whether or not it can be acquired.

In Sogdian art the nimbus is depicted as associated with deities and kings, but also with demons. However, it is not obligatory for either category. It is equally difficult to establish a pattern and correlation between the nimbus and other commonly employed divine and royal attributes such as tongues of flame or a diadem. There does not seem to be any consistency. For instance, the two kings from the epic paintings in room 1/VI wear elaborate crowns but are without a nimbus, tongues of flame, and diadem (although the latter is brought to them by a flying bird and another composite creature), while the harpist who serves as a caryatide in the paintings in the same room is nimbate.

The most often evoked interpretation of the nimbus not only in Sogdian but also in ancient Iranian art in general is that it represents the *x^varənah*, the "royal glory," which is the ultimate, necessary source of divine authority and legitimacy of the Iranian kingship according to the Zoroastrian texts and the *Shāh-nāma*. Taking into account that in the *Shāh-nāma*, *x^varənah* (New Persian *farr*) manifests itself as the light radiating from a king, it is plausible that the nimbus could be the visual representation of *x^varənah*. The fact that the nimbus can be lost apparently fits quite well with the characteristics according to the textual sources.⁵² However, one must acknowledge the fact that no pre-Islamic written source ever makes an explicit connection between the light radiating from a king and *x^varənah*. Furthermore, in various periods and in different cultures it might have different symbolisms and meaning, while in Panjikent this could even vary from one artistic team to another. Unlike in Sasanian Iran, where royal imagery was highly standardized and strictly regulated, the Sogdian artist enjoyed incomparably more freedom of expression. Therefore the same concept might have been imagined and depicted differently by different artists. There was no "canon" in Sogdian art, and it was not subjected to any form of control other than the preferences and requests of the private customers. The Sogdian artists experimented with various divine and royal attributes in their "tool kit," and for each room and each image they used one particular attribute or a number of them in various combinations.

The only images in Sogdian art that quite certainly represent *x^varənah* are fantastic flying creatures with lion, camel, horse, or bird heads and with the body of a fish or a dragon. They are depicted accompanying Rostam and other characters in paintings from Panjikent. The fact that the Sogdian flying creatures were indeed connected to the notion of *x^varənah* is unequivocally confirmed by a discovery of seventh-century coins with a Sogdian countermark bearing an image of such a creature labeled by a Sogdian inscription *prn (farn)*.⁵³ It is interesting to note that in Panjikent paintings these flying creatures are never depicted bringing diadems to the nimbate personages.

If the nimbus in the "Farāmarz paintings" is indeed a royal attribute, it would explain why only these three particular characters possess it, while Rostam and Farāmarz do not. The girl is a princess of Kahilā and Key Khosrow is the king of Iran; the demon who is undoubtedly represented as Farāmarz's principal opponent was probably also perceived as the "king of demons." Rostam and Farāmarz belong to the royal house of Zabulistan, but the senior member of the dynasty and the actual ruler is Rostam's father, Zāl. Furthermore, the house of Zabulistan is a "vassal" of the Iranian kings.

If the proposed interpretation of the paintings in room 50/XXIII is sound, other Panjikent epic paintings that at the moment remain unidentified may also reveal similar stories that were later recorded in the Persian "later epics." No less important, it would mean that these long-neglected sources might contain genuine pre-Islamic material.

Among the wealth of motives, exploits, and adventures connected with Farāmarz in the *Farāmarznāme*, which were probably also part of the Sogdian epic about the hero, the Sogdian artist chose to concentrate on scenes that glorify the "chivalrous" ethos of the Sogdian aristocracy: the military prowess and courage in battle against various opponents, humans and demons; the triumphal return home with trophies; and the royal reward to the brave and loyal hero.

Notes

1. I am very grateful to Marjolijn van Zutphen for sending me the text of her pioneering dissertation dedicated to Farāmarz and for her kind willingness to

answer my questions and to share with me her deep and intimate knowledge of the *Farāmarznāme*. I would also like to thank Frantz Grenet for his help and valuable comments.

2. Marshak 2002: 25–55; Grenet forthcoming.
3. Raspopova 1990: 171.
4. Raspopova 1990: 187.
5. Grenet forthcoming.
6. Belenitskiy, Marshak, and Raspopova 1984; Belenitskiy, Marshak, and Raspopova 1986.
7. Zeymal' 1985: nos. 578–79.
8. Marshak 2002: 109–17.
9. Tanabe and Maeda 1999: figs. 188–90.
10. One fragment depicting the enthronement scene from the lower register on the eastern wall is also published in the catalogue of the recent exhibition of the Hermitage Museum in Amsterdam. See Lurje and Samosyuk 2014: no. 117.
11. Marshak 2002: 109.
12. Marshak 1989: 119–20.
13. On such short inscriptions from the "Rostam Room," see Lurje 2013: 99–102.
14. Belenitskiy, Marshak, and Raspopova 1986: 328.
15. Belenitskiy, Marshak, and Raspopova 1984: 240–42.
16. Belenitskiy, Marshak, and Raspopova 1986: 324; Marshak 2002: 110.
17. Belenitskiy, Marshak, and Raspopova 1984: 244.
18. Belenitskiy, Marshak, and Raspopova 1986: 327–28.
19. Marshak 2002: 118.
20. Van Zutphen 2011. She is also engaged in preparation of the publication of a translation of the longer *Farāmarznāme*.
21. Van Zutphen 2011: 404.
22. Sims-Williams 2010: no. 104. I would like to thank Nicholas Sims-Williams for bringing this reference to my attention. It is noteworthy that the names of Farāmarz's son, Borzin-Ādar (*βορζαδορο), and of his companion Bizhan (βιζανο), are also attested in Bactrian. See Sims-Williams 2010: nos. 96 and 86.
23. Khaleghi-Motlagh 1999.
24. Van Zutphen 2011: 248.
25. Ibid., 305.
26. Ibid., 248.
27. Ibid., 35.
28. Ibid., 405, 407–9.
29. Grenet forthcoming: Appendix. This is the revised edition by Nicholas Sims-Williams of the original publication: Sims-Williams 1976: 54–61.
30. Van Zutphen 2011: 375–80.
31. Ibid., 344.
32. Ibid., 362.
33. Ibid., 257–58.
34. Grenet forthcoming.
35. Marshak 1989: 118. See also articles by Grenet 2006/2010 and Compareti 2009.

36. Marshak 2002: 111.
37. Grenet 2005: 129.
38. Van Zutphen 2011: 357.
39. Marshak 2002: 37–38.
40. Lunina and Usmanova 1985; Grenet 1993: 47–48.
41. For the most recent and detailed treatment of these paintings, see Compareti and de la Vaissière 2006; Naymark 2003.
42. This deity is usually identified after Marshak as the Sogdian image of Ahura Mazdā. See Marshak and Raspopova 1996: pp. 195–98, fig. 16; Grenet 2010: 92. There are, however, several arguments against this identification. See chapter on Ahura Mazdā in Shenkar forthcoming.
43. Van Zutphen 2011: 346.
44. See illustrations and discussions of the Sasanian enthronement scenes in Harper 1981: 99–124.
45. For example, see Marshak 2002: figs. 50, 97–98.
46. The golden battle-axe is one of the four objects that fell from the sky to be collected by the first Scythian king, Coloxais, in the famous myth told by Herodotus (4.5).
47. Marshak 2002: figs. 97–98.
48. Marshak and Raspopova 1990: 157–71.
49. Grenet 1986: fig. 44.
50. Trever and Lukonin 1987, no. 15. Harper 1981: 117–19.
51. Marshak 2002: 110.
52. For example, see the Avestan myth of Yima in *Yast* 19.30–34.
53. Nikitin and Roth 1995.

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